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the prominence of London as a centre for the resolution of international commercial disputes, and should reflect upon the status of the English Commercial Court as a truly international forum.

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John Macdonald, Ross Crail and Clive Jones, THE LAW OF FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

Oxford: Oxford University Press (www.oup.com), 2nd edn, 2009. lxxxviii + 1,212 pp. ISBN 9780199544356. £235.

A substantive law of freedom of information is something of a newcomer in the United Kingdom. The Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 created new rights of access to information held by public bodies. Although it has taken a few years for these respective statutes to generate interpretative case law there is now a significant corpus of case law prompting analysis. In addition to the tangible legal development of freedom of information law, political attitudes to freedom of information law in the last year or so suggest a dilution of political commitment. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair's recent memoir contained the following colourful reflection upon his decision to introduce freedom of information laws: "You idiot. You naive, foolish, irresponsible nincompoop. There is really no description of stupidity, no matter how vivid, that is adequate. I quake at the imbecility of it." In addition, there have been two ministerial vetoes under section 53 of the 2000 Act barring disclosure of Cabinet Minutes relating to Devolution, and the Iraq War. It is against this backdrop of increased legal development and political retrenchment that the appearance of a second edition of *The Law of Freedom of Information* is to be welcomed as a safe guide through the more complicated aspects of its subject matter.

The new edition, like the first, is very much a child of New Square Chambers—all the contributors are members, or former members, of the set (a characteristic shared by its main, and considerably cheaper, competitor: P Coppel, *Information Rights* (3rd edn, 2010), which hails from 4-5 Gray's Inn Square). Yet, while the spawning ground of the text may be the same, the second edition has shed a slightly speculative air that (necessarily) pervaded the first edition because the Freedom of Information Acts were *not* then in force. This second edition retains the prescient strengths of the first edition, but at the same time structural changes and comprehensive digestion of recent developments provides a more refined product.

Understandably, there is less historical narration concerning the agitation for freedom of information laws within the United Kingdom at the outset of the text—that they are now a clear and present reality diminishes the importance of that story. Helpfully, a historical narrative is retained later in the text as a useful contextualisation of the ideals underpinning the legislation. However, the introductory fundamentals of the text are, appropriately, directed towards the fact that there are multiple intersections between information law regimes, and the text deals with this point with an admirable balance of accessibility and depth. This balance is important but difficult to strike in the realm of information law, where the technicalities of different statutes can become eye-wateringly complex. By setting out in a clear and accessible manner the core anatomy of the Freedom of Information Act 2000—the right to information under section 1 of the Act, the broadly correlative duty on the part of the public body to confirm or deny, and

the operation of different types of exemptions from the generalised right to information – the text achieves an admirable clarity of expression. In terms of depth the treatment is equally impressive. In particular chapters 4 and 5, dealing with potentially labyrinthine statutory provisions, sacrifice no detail regarding the operation of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, without losing the reader in an intellectual morass. The coverage of environmental information laws and data protection laws in chapters 9 and 10 is well digested and authoritative, as is chapter 11 dealing with freedom of information in European Union. These three chapters are conceptually interlinked somewhat by the importance of European Union activity in the sphere of environmental information and data protection law – something underlined by the decision in *Office of Communications v The Information Commissioner* [2010] UKSC 3, where the United Kingdom Supreme Court made a reference to the European Court of Justice to ascertain whether the exceptions regime under the Environmental Information Regulations 2004, SI 2004/3391 should be considered cumulatively when considering the public interest in disclosure.

Beyond the mechanical operation of different information law regimes, later chapters utilise a user-friendly structure based upon broad themes, which are informed by instances of factual application. This should render the text particularly useful for the practitioner. The chapters dealing with the implications of freedom of information in the commercial world are particularly illuminating. One might also be forgiven for suggesting at this point that the title of the text seems rather modestly restrictive. A number of chapters dealing with other important information laws under the heading “Related Statutes” are of considerable interest, and one would suspect they would be readily appreciated by practitioners, particularly those dealing with the vexed subjects of money laundering and medical records.

The law of Scotland’s place in the text is somewhat uneasily positioned at the rear of the substantive text alongside Wales and Northern Ireland, and in close proximity to a comparative analysis of other members of the Common Law family’s information laws. This is of course not an unusual location for a treatment of Scotland’s system of law in many texts dealing with law throughout the United Kingdom. In the sphere of information law it is even less surprising given the complexity of the plurality of information law regimes which operate within the jurisdiction – the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 are both capable of applying within the jurisdiction. That is before taking into account the complications of what are, at least formally, different environmental information rules. The text’s explanation of the interface between the United Kingdom and Scottish legislation is thoughtful and thorough. In dealing with the substance of the Scottish rules the text is accurate and pretty comprehensive, though it might have been helpful to include greater reference to decisions of the Scottish Information Commissioner, and to have given more discursive attention to some of the difficulties posed by the Scottish Information Commissioner’s lack of jurisdiction with respect to data protection issues.

This new edition of the text comfortably maintains the text’s status as one of the market leaders, especially for practitioners, and its attention to detail and accuracy should also commend it to an academic audience seeking a succinct and comprehensive statement of the law. For students, and freedom of information officers in organisations who are not legally trained, the text will also be of use as a reference text, though the quantity and quality of legal analysis would perhaps require it to be used in conjunction with a more elementary introductory text.

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